Tatiana Makarova

THE BRAVE ANT

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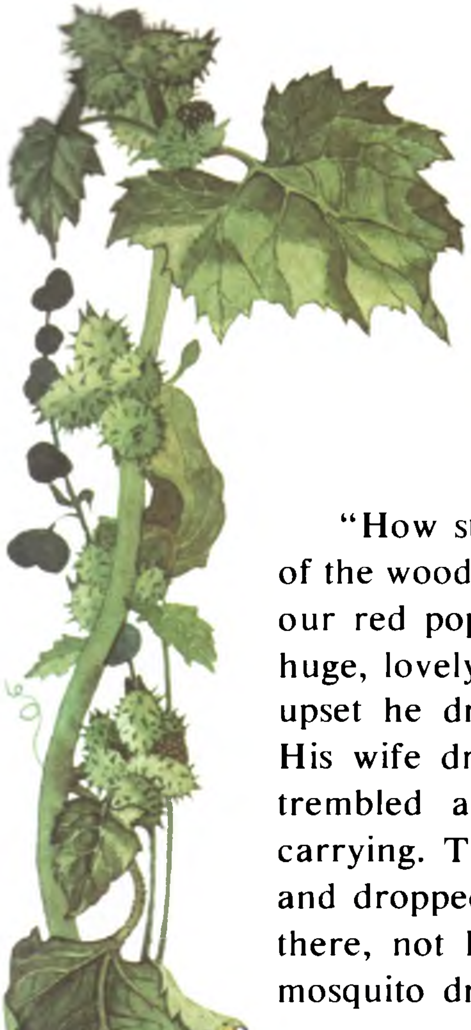
Once upon a time there was an ant. You probably want to know his name and what his friends, his forty sons and daughters, his beloved old mother and his dear wife all called him. There are many different names, and I certainly can't name them all here, but the ant I'm talking about was simply called Ant.

At dawn the ants in the anthill are still sleeping soundly. This is what Ant was thinking about in his sleep: "There are twenty families in our hill. On Monday Nikolai's family brought home pine needles. On Tuesday the family upstairs brought sawdust. On Wednesday Yermolai was supposed to go to the woods, and on Thursday Semyon set out to find a dragonfly's wing for the windows. On Friday, despite the rain, Yevgeny found three pine chips. I hate the thought of getting up now, but I'll have to. Today's Saturday, and it's our turn." Ant got up and called to his family: "Everybody up! Everybody out! We're going to the woods for pine needles."

Ant and his family worked hard in the woods all day. They didn't return until sunset. Ant was dragging a bundle of six pine needles and his wife was carrying a bundle of three. Ant's sons had found two chips near the stream and his daughters had some dandelion fluff. The youngest son was dragging the stem of a leaf and the smallest daughter had found some pollen. They were all hurrying down the long green path through the woods. When they finally reached home they saw that their anthill was gone.



"How strange," Ant said. "This is our part of the woods. And this is our clearing. These are our red poppies. But where is our home? Our huge, lovely, twenty-family house?" He was so upset he dropped his bundle of pine needles. His wife dropped her bundle, too. Their sons trembled and dropped the chips they were carrying. Their daughters curled up unhappily and dropped the dandelion fluff. As they stood there, not knowing what to do, they heard a mosquito droning loudly:

"Hey, Ant! While you were rushing about and your poor children were working so hard, dragging those awful brambles instead of playing, and while your poor, exhausted wife lugged those pine logs, your baby was bent double under a huge stem and your youngest daughter struggled with that huge load of pollen, your anthill moved to another part of the forest. They didn't even leave you a note."

But Mosquito was lying! He was holding a leaf, and there was a note for Ant on that leaf, left by his friends before they had moved.

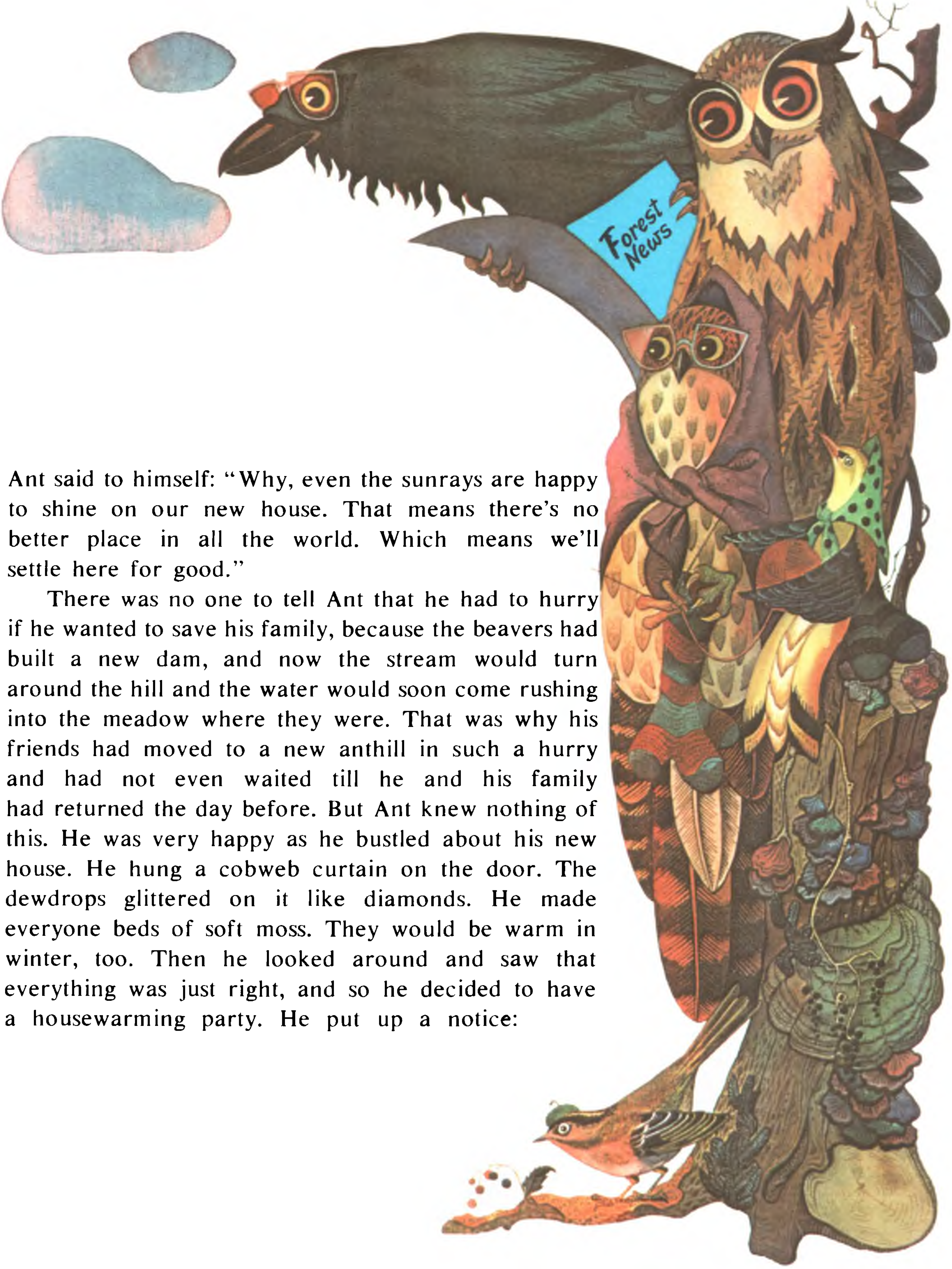
They never should have given the note to Mosquito! Everyone knows you can never trust a mosquito. He didn't say a word to Ant about the note before he flew away.

Ant felt very lonely. He had no friends left and no neighbors. There was not a trace of them to be found. Ant had never known what loneliness meant. He had never had time to feel lonely. All the ants in the anthill were always up early in the morning and Ant was used to rushing back and forth, always in a hurry, up and down, here and there, pulling, pushing, teaching his children to be good workers, too. Naturally, he had never had time to feel lonely.

"Dear neighbor,
We've been forced to move on short notice and are in a great hurry. We'll explain everything when we see you. Follow these instructions and you'll find us. Turn right till you come to three trees growing in a circle near a fallen pine tree. Our new ant-hill is right behind it. See you soon."

However, he had no time to think about being lonely now, either, for he knew that night would soon be upon them and he had to provide some shelter for his family. He patted his wife's shoulder and said trying to sound cheerful, "Don't worry. Everything will be all right. An ant will always find shelter for the night for his family. And ants are never downhearted, they never give up, not even in fairy tales for baby ants."

And so Ant set off to look for a home for the night. He stopped at every tree stump and at every blade of grass, but they were all either too damp or too hard and cold for comfort. Suddenly he spotted an empty tin can with a bright label on it. "Aha!" he said. "Here's a good tin roof and a fine scalloped door. I couldn't have wished for a better home for my children." In no time the family had moved in. When the sun came up the next morning its rays hit the shiny tin, making the can gleam and glitter.



Ant said to himself: "Why, even the sunrays are happy to shine on our new house. That means there's no better place in all the world. Which means we'll settle here for good."

There was no one to tell Ant that he had to hurry if he wanted to save his family, because the beavers had built a new dam, and now the stream would turn around the hill and the water would soon come rushing into the meadow where they were. That was why his friends had moved to a new anthill in such a hurry and had not even waited till he and his family had returned the day before. But Ant knew nothing of this. He was very happy as he bustled about his new house. He hung a cobweb curtain on the door. The dewdrops glittered on it like diamonds. He made everyone beds of soft moss. They would be warm in winter, too. Then he looked around and saw that everything was just right, and so he decided to have a housewarming party. He put up a notice:

"Notice: Everyone is invited for tea this afternoon."

At five o'clock a drove of dragonflies and moths came flying into his new house. He did not know them, but liked them from the start.

When the forest animals wondered where all the dragonflies and moths were, Magpie said: "Why, they're all at a party in a round tin house. You can hear them singing if you listen."

There was room enough for all and goodies as well.

After a while Ant's eldest son, a reddish fellow, decided to go for a walk. But he stopped in his tracks at the doorstep and cried: "Help! We're surrounded by water! It's a flood! Help!"

"Help! Help! It's a flood!" the moths and dragonflies all cried and flew out the door, leaving so many tasty things on their plates.

As always, brave Ant met the danger boldly. He was not one to get panicky. There was really nothing to get worried about, because he and his family were now sailing down the stream in their new house. Life was still as full of cares and hard work as before. Ant had to get up early each morning as always, hurry up the rigging, fasten the sail, pipe everyone on deck, tie up at some landing, take on supplies, explore the shore, talk to strange ants he met there and tell them how wonderful it was to be living in a houseboat.

Did you ever notice something glittering in the distance when you stood on a riverbank? Did you ever think you heard a piping song coming from far away:

"Let me tell you of my family:
There are many of us, as you see.
We are happy to be in a boat
We are sailing to sea! We're afloat!
Now although none of us has a fin,
I am teaching my children to swim,
That's because I am just what I am,
I'm a seafaring ant, that I am!"

50 коп.

Translation from the Russian

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